



**FRANKLIN COUNTY GOVERNMENT
COURTHOUSE CONSTRUCTION PROJECT UPDATE
1/13/2020**

Two important dates are quickly approaching concerning work on the new Franklin County Courthouse – the completion of work at the Campbell Building and the mammoth task of moving three county offices to the newly-renovated building, located on the south side of the Benton Public Square.

While the project of moving the county clerk, county treasurer, circuit clerk and the court system will soon take place the Franklin County Board is busy wrapping up a needs assessment and planning report that will allow them to finalize a budget for construction of the new 46,000 square-foot courthouse that will replace the current facility that was built in 1875.

Here is an update on issues important to taxpayers and those who utilize both county buildings:

The county committee made up of two county board members and other county personnel received a report on January 7, 2020 from the architectural firm of White & Borgononi and project manager Navigate Building Solutions. The exhaustive and lengthy needs assessment evaluation that included a 60-page report by Fentress Inc. – a nationally renowned firm that specializes in courthouse construction – included a detailed analysis of demographics, workload, economics and projected personnel.

Based on that report the first cost proposal came in at \$23,687,054 -- well over the budget that the county is trying to maintain. Within 48 hours of that meeting the county board pieced together possible cutbacks that total more than \$3.1 million. In addition to that the \$23 million estimate also includes \$2.1 million in contingency money, to make up for any unexpected costs and \$1.4 million for the renovation at the Campbell Building.

County Board Chairman Randall Crocker said he is “extremely confident” that the county can bring the cost down even more. Crocker and other county officials conducted and spoke at more than 50 town hall and civic and municipal meetings while trying to sell the proposals to voters who passed the referendum on April 2, 2019 by a resounding margin with 58 percent voting in favor. Crocker said during all those meetings \$18 million was the dollar amount given for the cost of the new courthouse.

“The county board is working hard to keep the costs down and stay within budget,” Crocker said. “I feel like when we get finished exploring every line item involving cost that we can be in that ballpark. We’re not there yet but I believe we will get there.”

Crocker also pointed out that the cost to renovate the Campbell Building exceeded the budget estimate by \$1 million and felt it was important to explain that discrepancy. He emphasized that the original cost estimate of \$400,000 only included the construction on the ground floor at the Campbell Building for offices to house the county clerk and county treasurer. The board originally planned to renovate a building on the east side of the square that formerly housed an antique store to relocate the circuit clerk and court system but later decided against that and instead opted to renovate the 10,000 square foot basement of the county-owned Campbell Building. Crocker said the other building would have cost the county \$2,000 a month rent and any work done there would have simply been wasted money. He also said that when the new courthouse is completed and the circuit clerk and court system moves to the new structure the county is exploring ideas of moving offices such as Franklin County 911, Franklin County EMA and CASA to that location, a move that will virtually put all county government under one roof.

Crocker said some of the people that have toured the Campbell Building have given rave reviews to the point of asking why a new courthouse is even needed.

“First, and most importantly, we live in a different world than even a few years ago and we cannot bring security at the Campbell Building to the level it needs to be,” said Crocker. “Also, the Illinois Supreme Court has very strict guidelines on certain standards that have to be met in court rooms and we cannot meet those standards at the Campbell Building.”

The county board will meet at 6 p.m. on January 21, 2020 in the Campbell Building to vote on a final budget number for the new courthouse.

Other important dates and items of importance include:

- Movers are schedule to begin moving files and other furniture from the old courthouse to the Campbell Building on Friday, January 17, 2020 and will continue throughout the weekend. Moving will also continue on Monday, January 20, 2020, the MLK holiday when county offices will be closed.
- There are no court dates (except for emergencies) scheduled for several dates in the next month. Those dates include Jan. 21, 23, 24 and Jan. 27 through Jan. 31. There will also be no scheduled court dates Feb. 3 through Feb. 7, 2020.
- A new automated phone system for county government will go into effect on January 22, 2020. The new number to reach all county offices (except the sheriff and state's attorney) will be 618-435-9800. A message prompt will allow callers to push a number to reach the county clerk, treasurer, circuit clerk, judges and court reporters, domestic abuse advocate, GIS/mapping, court security, supervisor of assessments and election office.
- McVicker Excavating, of Herrin, IL, was the lowest bidder on the demolition of the Benton Evening News office. The building will be torn down later in January to pave the way for more parking near the Campbell Building.
- Bid and complete environmental abatement at the old courthouse in February or early March.